

## ORGANIZATION

## Supporting Details

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In a unified paragraph, all of the sentences directly support the main idea or topic sentence. Including details that are not relevant to the main idea makes your paragraph unclear and distracts your reader from the point you are making.

### **The Purpose of Supporting Details:**

1. Keep the reader focused on the main idea of the paragraph
2. Demonstrate that your topic sentence or main idea is accurate and believable
3. Make your meaning clear and forceful with concrete, specific information

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. Does this sentence directly explain the topic sentence or main idea? What new information does it add?
2. Would any essential information be lost if this sentence were deleted? If not, delete it.
3. Is this information distracting or unimportant? If so, delete it.

### **Types of Supporting Details:**

1. Reasons -- explanations that tell why an opinion is valid
2. Facts -- statements that can be proved
3. Statistics -- facts expressed in numbers
4. Examples -- specific instances that explain or demonstrate a point
5. Sensory Details -- appeals to one or more of the physical senses
6. Anecdotes -- brief stories about a character or event

*NOTE: Using a quote or paraphrasing another author's ideas is not, in and of itself, a good supporting detail! To use citation effectively, you need to explain the connection between the citation and your main point in your own words.*

**Sample Paragraph with Supporting Details:** Reality TV shows that followed *Survivor* had none of the interesting elements that it had. *Big Brother* was the first spin-off reality TV show to try to repeat the success of *Survivor*, but it did not offer the drama that *Survivor* did. In *Big Brother*, contestants were locked in a house without any outside contact for weeks. As in *Survivor*, there was a cash prize on the line, but in *Big Brother* there were not any competitions or struggles. Contestants were expelled by a viewer phone poll, so the poll gave them no motive to scheme and plot allegiances the way *Survivor* contestants did. In fact, the contestants had little to do except bicker and fight. Viewers lost interest in players who were not up against any challenge except weeks of boredom. In the end, *Big Brother* was simply not interesting.

## **Guidelines for Supporting Details**

### **1. Focus on *who, what, when, where, why, and how* questions.**

*Vague:* Some animals hibernate for part of the year. (What animals? Where?)

*Specific:* Some bears hibernate for three to four months each winter.

### **2. Name names.**

*Vague:* When my sixty-three-year-old aunt was refused a job, she became an angry victim of age discrimination.

*Specific:* When my sixty-three-year-old Aunt Angela was refused a job at Vicki's Nail Salon, she became an angry victim of age discrimination.

### **3. Use action verbs.**

*Vague:* When Silina came on stage, the audience became excited.

*Specific:* When Silina burst onto the stage, the audience screamed, cheered, and chanted "Silina, Silina!"

### **4. Use descriptive language that appeals to the senses (smell, touch, taste, sound, sight).**

*Vague:* It's relaxing to walk on the beach.

*Specific:* I walked in the sand next to the ocean, breathing in the smell of the salt water and listening to the rhythmic sound of the waves.

### **5. Use adjectives and adverbs.**

*Vague:* As I weeded my garden, I let my eyes wander over the meadow sweets and hydrangeas, all the while listening to the chirping of a cardinal.

*Specific:* As I slowly weeded my perennial garden, I let my eyes wander over the pink meadow sweets and blue hydrangeas, all the while listening absent-mindedly to the chirping of a bright red cardinal.

*NOTE: Use adjectives and adverbs carefully. A passage filled with too many modifiers will be tiring to your reader. Think about which modifiers help to make the idea feel concrete and real to your readers and choose wisely.*